

Northampton Policing Review Public Hearing

MEETING AGENDA
Tuesday, December 1, 2020
6:30pm-9:30pm
Remote meeting

To join the Video-conferencing meeting:

https://zoom.us/j/97105755541?pwd=cUYwK0s5ejJLQTJuaEFXcEhqTlMyQ_T09

Or call: (929)- 436-2866. Meeting ID 954 7923 6229, password 773975

1. Call to Order
 - a. Announcement of Zoom Recording
 - b. Roll Call
2. Subcommittee Presentations (5-10 minutes each)
 - a. Alternatives to Policing
 - b. Budgets & Contracts
 - c. Policies & Procedures
3. Public Comment (5 minutes comment, 5 minutes Q&A, 10 minute maximum per speaker) | 7pm-9:30pm
4. Adjourn

1. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order by Commissioner Dana Olivo at 6:34 PM.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF ZOOM RECORDING

Noa Coffey-Moore made an announcement that this meeting was being recorded for the public record and would be available on Northampton Open Media, as well as, the City of Northampton website.

Commissioner Lois Ahrens present
Commissioner Elizabeth Barajas-Roman present
Commissioner Booker Bush present
Commissioner Dan Cannity (co-chair) present
Commissioner Nick Fleisher present
Commissioner David Hoose present
Commissioner Alex Jarrett present
Commissioner Javier Luengo-Garrido present
Commissioner Dana Olivo (co-chair) present
Commissioner Nnamdi Pole present

Commissioner Michael Quinlan present
Commissioner Josey Rosales present
Commissioner Cynthia Suopis present
Commissioner Carol Owens present

2. Subcommittee presentations

Commissioner Booker Bush shared the Alternatives to Policing Subcommittee has been focusing on alternatives to the response to mental health calls as their major issue. He explained, the committee is looking into programs from across the country with responder models, models who solely rely upon social workers, as well as restorative justice programs with peer-led care, as well as models that

Commissioner Alex Jarrett shared that other research the Alternatives to Policing Subcommittee is doing is on domestic violence and substance abuse which the commission will be investigating further in terms of alternatives.

Commissioner Lois Ahrens read a brief from the Contracts and Spending subcommittee and named some of their intentions are understanding budget details as it pertains to revenue, costs, and pay. She shared, the subcommittee's intention is to support the commission relocation for recent 10% funding as it has not yet been allocated; to potentially fund warming shelters, community centers, and help Northampton to meet its public sanitation needs. She shared, understanding the budget a part of the puzzle.

Commissioner Nick Fleisher thanked the public for being present. He read a summary of the Policies and Services Subcommittee and shared it is looking at the existing structure of the police department.

He shared further the subcommittee seeks to understand strengths and weaknesses of the current policing system and seeking to reduce the footprint of department activities. He shared further that the subcommittee is focusing on complaint processes, strategic planning processes, police officer training, and finding better possibilities for responses to mental health needs.

3. Public Comment

Commissioner Dana Olivo explained the public comment process.

Community member Steve Jones thanked everyone involved with the commission. He wondered if choke holds have been addressed.

Community member Jose Adastra (local organizer with decarceration and abolition groups), said he is advocating for local houseless population who are at high risk for state violence. He said he advocates for people who originally lived here, and for homeless people who are subjected to white men's cruelty. He said he begs the commission to help change ordinances to build homes for people who are on the street because of white men who have brought upon a rampage of abuse.

Community member Tay said they organize with unhoused people in Northampton and that Northampton creates massive human rights violations every day. They said there is no access to public drinking water right now and that people have come to speak and were not

comfortable sharing because of fear of social services and police, or they have to be in shelters by 6pm. They said they want to remind the commission why people don't come to public hearings.

Community members Ellen Koteen and Diane Palladino said the training the police receive before they become police has become more and more militaristic. She recommended there be more examination into the training police are getting.

Community member Sean Donovan thanked the commission for the public hearing. He named some of the people who have the most to share, have the most at stake, and can't come because they either need to be at a shelter at 6pm, or are afraid. He explained that peer led work means that people might share the experiences of the people they are trying to support, and it also means aspiring not to take power over people. He shared, he has been a part of alternatives to suicide peer support group which has been a space to talk about experiences of distress. He explained that when we rely on systems embedded in the system of policing, we create more trauma for people and that it does not lead places to the healing places they need to be.

Community member Amelia Mosley asked in terms of defunding the police, what types of challenges could this bring to community members as well as the police department? They asked In terms of the racial injustice exclusive to Northampton, what are the initiatives the department has taken to combat these and prevent them from happening in the future?

Commissioner Dan Cannity answered the first question. He said there is not one set path. There are different municipalities. He named there are programs, such as responder across the country, which decreased crime and made people more safe because they were interacting with police less.

He said the Policies and Services committee may be able to answer the second question. Commissioner Nick Fleisher said Amelia's second question is in line with the subcommittee's desire to learn more about strategic planning, and training that is specifically geared in that direction.

Community member Arvid Nelson named the Northampton police department as one of the most progressive in the country. He said he thinks the cuts that have been already made have been a mistake, and the most vulnerable people are going to be at risk. He said he stands with the Northampton police department and he hopes the members of the commission do as well.

Community member Henry Morgan said he agrees with Commissioner Booker Bush that the values of the city are reflected by their budget. He said, putting money into the police reflects poorly on the values of Northampton and that Northampton's tax money should be going towards things that take us out of oppression.

Community member J.J shared there seems to be diversity in terms of the commissioners on the commission, yet there is no diversity of thought and perspective which feels troublesome to her, as she thinks the conversation could be one sided and could lead to bias. She shared, if there is further defunding of the police department, retention of officers may happen, which means there will not be the best of the best applying.

Commissioner Dan Cannity shared that everyone who is a part of the commission sent a letter of interest to the mayor or the city council to apply.

Commissioner Lois Ahrens shared she does not know what the outcome will be, even after

spending hours with the commission since the beginning.

Community member Ashwin Ravikumar recommended building capacity with organizations who are already doing this work, as well as creating new agencies. He shared there is record speaking to the lineage of policing from slavery through Jim Crow. He said we don't need new data or evidence when Black people are being killed, as well as when there is data about the policing system being harmful. He recommends dispensing from the notion that this issue has two sides. He said he feels distraught by Commissioner Nick Fleishers comment about investigating strategic planning, because there is evidence that these reforms don't work and don't solve the problem of policing Black people.

Community member and reporter Jackson Coate had a question for the contracts and spending committee. He named Commissioner Lois Ahrens found discrepancies with pay information for officers, and asked her for specifics about police officer pay.

Commissioner Dan Caninity said the commission requested years of salary information including overtime, detail pay, as well as base salaries. He said in a couple of years there were a number of individuals who received either detail pay or overtime pay but did not have a place in the budget. He shared they're wondering why there is a discrepancy.

Community member and reporter Jackson Coate asked if the commission finds abuses, if they would become transparent because this information is beneficial to the public.

Commissioner Dan Cannity shared the commission would like to make sure there is not a discrepancy in how the information was reported and that the commission wants to make sure they have the appropriate information before moving forward.

Commissioner Michael Quinlan stated officers may work in the state police, and may come from outside of the Northampton department which may be why the detail and overtime work are listed in one bucket but not the other.

Community member Dana Goldblatt (lawyer) said bringing police into a holy place makes it scary for the community. She said it sounds like the Alternatives to Policing subcommittee is still considering responder models. She said she wants to know what the commission feels the police bring in responder model contexts and what the reason responder models are still being considered under these alternatives.

Commissioner Carol Owen shared the Alternatives to Policing subcommittee is researching many models. She shared she feels there is no problem with a clinical member with a peer, so that the police do not need to be involved. She shared she wants to address the concern about there not being diversity of thought- and stated that this is not true. She mentioned the preliminary report which will reflect the diversity of opinions. She explained, she believes the charge of the commission is to examine what's happening in Northampton, what we don't like, and how we can change the culture of public safety so that vulnerable people don't continue to have harmful experiences.

Community member Mark Cote shared, in regards to comments alleging police are underpaid, or that there are issues with retention; he recommends examining comparisons between the salaries and number of police in this city, as compared to similarly sized cities. He shared at a protest for racial justice in Northampton, he was a peacekeeper making sure there was no violence at the protest. He explained further, with a team of twenty people, they were able to keep 450 people safe for more than five hours and that there were no police interventions needed because the team used deescalation, and crisis response training. He said, the team responded to several cases of potential escalation and were able

to prevent all violence escalation. He said seeing more militarization of the police did not make people less angry or violent.

Community member Noah shared he believes the commission has the power to reallocate funds toward supporting people who need services most. He shared, police are not trained in empathy, understanding, or compassion.

Commissioner Cynthia Suopis said that there are a range of ideas of members of the commission. She said the policing policies and services subcommittee is looking into how police are trained. She said the training is written by and conducted by the same people under review and that the committee is looking into all aspects of that. She said the committee is trying to do unbelievable due diligence to get the information, share it, push back at one another on this commission. She said personally, she's learned from people on the commission and from people this summer and on the public hearing. She hopes people have faith in this process.

Commissioner Nick Fleisher thanked community member Emily Coffin and said these are real important questions and the commission has to look at realities.

Community member Danielle Amodeo (chair of Northampton arts Council) said she is hearing a lot of fear in terms of thinking about what the city is going to look like without police. She asked the commission to trust what people are saying and that there is a way forward without police that calls for a peer-led community based model. She requested the commission make efforts to hear from unhoused Northampton members. She asked if the commission has plans to work with community organizations, to meet with houseless community, as well as to meet with people who feel unsafe to share at public hearing and to find a way to do so before the first recommendations are made. She also asked the commission to commit to sharing the ROC's best practices in its report. She also wondered whether there is a shared drive that is public.

Commissioner Javier Luengo-Garrido said this is an opportunity to invite anyone in the community to attend the subcommittee meetings. He shared Sean Donovan will be attending the Alternatives to Policing meeting tomorrow.

Commissioner Josey Rosales wants to interact with people and need more testimony and recognize the ramifications that happen. They suggested the public get in contact with them.

Commissioner Javier Luengo-Garrido said the commission has been talking about privilege within its members. He said he brings these issues around privilege to the table and he feels proud of how the Alternatives to Policing subcommittee is talking about this.

Community Member Susan Balaban said the town government establishes what salaries are. She said people who no longer highered out of police academy and positions eliminated were of color and mostly women and that it would be helpful to know if this is not true. She said police have to have a certain amount of people per capita and that Northampton is below capita.

Commissioner Dan Cannity said she is welcome to come to the next subcommittee meeting and that the commission is working to connect with people who do this work. He shared, Carol has sent 20+ articles on these models.

Community member Rebecca Martin (Community Organizer and Peer advocate), shared the police officers uniform has a history of abuse and power and that it has become evident it has elevated them out of the laws they are paid to uphold. She shared she is not anti-officer, she is anti-tyranny. She explained further, that when police enter a situation when a person is traumatized, there is a shut down of realness. She said the badge and the gun, and the immunity changes things in an instant and that when a peer meets a peer not in a uniform and not elevated, people can get through. She noted the importance of communicating in a way where everyone has dignity. She called for the importance of a non emergency first responder peer to peer model that has more options than simply calling the police.

Community member Ellen McGrath said it was done backwards- they cut the budget and now are deciding what to reallocate to. She noted the police department is recognized as a leading department in the nation. She said she is wondering if the city knows they make 10% off of every hour of detail. He asked the commission whether it has spoken to the police chief about what the job entails, and what they think a social worker is able to respond to.

Commissioner Dan Cannity said the city's process is that they don't make members of the department that is being reviewed on the commission that is reviewing it. He said the commission has plans to talk to the department in specific ways. He said the commission has been asking for information and they've been giving it to the commission.

Community member J.R (Local advocate) said he is in favor of abolishing the entirety of the police department. He said, there was a biochemical terrorist rally that happened in Northampton which should not occur. He explained, the police gave an escort to this rally which shows they are working on their side. He named the department does not comply with mass mandates or other safety precautions. He said he demands a community lead crisis response department led by and with the community.

Community member Gabriel P. shared they work with trauma survivors. They said a police officer outside of a synagog made them feel like they had less access to this space. They advocate for peer-led programs that are directly accountable to communities. They shared further that Housing First programs have saved communities money because it addresses a problem before it leads to emergencies services. He said all social services are reactionary services and that the commission needs to take money from the police budget and invest in community support programs that directly serve the needs of members before crime or crisis occurs.

Community member Lilith said having police in schools is a constant reminder of policing presence in school. She mentioned an incident of a boy with autism being shot in the back for having a breakdown. She said Northampton does not exist in a vacuum and that it should strive to be a leader and give people of color and disabled folks the love and safety they deserve.

Community member Elliot Oberholtzer said there's a lot of fear and anxiety particularly of white folks being asked to think about the future. He said he would like to see a future where people don't have to leave, and where people can be safe even if they're houseless. He suggests the commission's recommendations should be clear, bold, exciting, data informed, but not about data. He recommends the commission get commitments from the mayor players that they need to make their recommendations.

Community member B.J's Ipad said comparing the Northampton Police department to other police departments is wrong. She said she sees hypocrisy in the Black Lives Matter movement because they are doing the same thing to police officers. She said she's not seeing a lot of pro police sentiments on the commission. She recommends the commission talking to the chief or other police to hear their perspective.

Community member Manny Pintado said he was at the Trump Rally in Northampton and said you call the police when there is a threat of harm. He shared that domestic disputes don't need to involve law enforcement. He said he believes in allocating funding to places such as safe passage and the crisis lines. He said he would love to be involved with a committee.

Community member Rye Buckley thanked the commission for being here. He suggested the commission look into the podcast, The Untold Story of Policing which talks about how police unions are able to leverage their power to negotiate wage negotiations. He told a story about his father being harassed by police just trying to work late at night. He said the department does not need armed traffic police stopping people for traffic violations.

Community member Patrick said they don't feel safe in Northampton because they don't feel safe around police officers. They don't think having more police will make them feel more safe. He said his biggest fear is that their partner, who is Black, will become a law enforcement statistic. They said they feel concerned about the commission asking how the system works. They said they want to caution the commission basing their recommendations on a systemically racist system.

Community member Bo Clark thanked the commissioners and admin. They spoke to the experience of unhoused people in Northampton and said there is still no public water which got shut off for winter without infrastructure to provide that for people. They explained further that houseless people are relying upon businesses, which during the pandemic is a hard reality. They said people are struggling to wash their hands during a pandemic. They said there are large gaps of infrastructure, and they recommend the commission making recommendations toward public sanitation. They talked about how there are specifications about times people can be in certain areas, which gives police precedent to "trespass them" which results in a fine and going to court. They mention the Mayor's Panhandling study and lists data about Northampton Policies. They recommend a peer-support model based in self-determination.

Community member Hannah Begley asked a rhetorical question to the commission, "When you're driving your car and you're not doing anything illegal and you see a police officer, how do you feel?" They said they feel terrified even as a white person. They said the police's slogan should be "terrorize and intimidate", not "serve and protect". They told a personal story and felt horrible that the police station was their only option when they were having a traumatizing situation. They said the police embody authority that abuses their power.

Community member Larkin Christie said the commission must abolish and defund the police. They said any oppressive system comes with benefits from some and that we can't give individual experiences more weight than the history of policing and people that were harmed.

Community member Robert shared he is in a group chat where his family is discussing whether they should call the police about a domestic dispute. He said they don't want to and feel like they don't have other options. He shared he has volunteered for the mass bail fund and has had bail commissioners scream at him, corrections officers intimidating and

lying. He said he bailed out someone who had been in prison for months for a drug charge he couldn't afford the bail. He hoped the commission will make recommendations that are long lasting.

Commissioner Lois Ahrens said the commission is not an ongoing commission and will have a series of recommendations and then it will be up to the Mayor and to City Council, in tandem with the residents of Northampton to advocate for the recommendations they would like to see realized.

Community member Kala Garrido thanked the commission for their work. She said building peer led safety programs is important. She said school resource officers fuel the dehumanization of children of color, that it suggests children need to be surveilled, and assumes criminality. She said there is no data that proves SROs prevent school shootings, and that it boosts the school to prison pipeline, making it easier examples from their lived experience: one student told her she was followed by an SRO to the water fountain. One student told her they felt there was exacerbated tension between students and administration. One student said they do not feel safe going to school where there is an SRO.

Community member Ace Tayloe said they are in support of defunding the police and suggests moving the jobs they are presently doing, to people that don't have bias toward violence. They said, the training that is given is training in violence and that police will attempt to solve problems violently. They recommend ending qualified immunity for Northampton officers operating within the bounds of the city. They explain further, a policing reform bill just passed in Northampton which left off qualified immunity for officers, which means if a police officer kills someone, they are not liable. They explained, police officers are the only group that has this immunity and recommends

Community member Brian Zayatz asked the commission if any of the discussions they've had, have brought up the issue of disarming the police.

Commissioner Booker Bush shared the Alternatives committee has not yet looked at disarming the police. He said the subcommittee is aware of experiments of using non-weaponized security.

Commissioner Carol Owen said her subcommittee is looking into models that move part of the police budget over into social services.

Community member Alex D thanked the commission for their work. She said she believes police do not belong in places of worship. She said these systems are meant to benefit white people. She recommended the commission research Research School officers and the school to prison pipeline.

Community member Emily Ownes asked the commission not make any recommendations that give resources or authority to the police.

Community member SFrydman shared there was work being done on her street by National grid or Columbia Gas and that there were six cops not wearing masks, walking up and down street. She wondered if there's scrutiny into that, and whether the commission can encourage the union to renegotiate or find data about large police presence on small construction projects.

Community member Michael Quinlan said detail jobs like this are not funded by the city, but are rather funded by the company who is doing the work and are paid privately. He said the police union has been able to hold onto that work

Community member Ya Ping Douglass wondered how much time the commission has spent looking into articles that show police training doesn't work.

Commissioner Elizabeth Barajas-Roman encouraged people to attend Policies and Procedures subcommittee. She said the committee hasn't reached any conclusions and that it is taking a rigorous deep dive into all information out there and interrogating it against known research. She said this legitimacy of process is important to recommendation

Administrative Assistant Noa Coffey-Moore moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:22pm. The motion adjourn is passed unanimously.